

HIKMA – A TEACHING METHOD TO INSPIRE HIGHER LEARNING

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Abstract

Existing teaching methods are uninspiring and diminish the desire to learn. A new teaching format, hikma, was developed to inspire learning and acquire wisdom. Hikma is a well-prepared narrative lecture followed by scholarly open discussion on a topic. It is delivered by a learned teacher to a group of students. A written guide for students outlines expectations and etiquettes for the session. Learners listen respectfully without interrupting. The teacher's presentation is carefully prepared and well planned. The presentation includes definitions, examples, case studies, findings from research, as well as historical perspective, personal experiences, stories, and quotes. Content is selected to weave a central message. The talk progresses logically and builds an argument leading to a conclusion that the students can infer (guided discovery). Presentation style stimulates reflection and introspection. Students' questions are kept towards the end to prevent the discourse from being side-tracked. In the second part of the session, a focused discussion is moderated by the teacher. Each student is given the opportunity ask a carefully thought-out question. After the discussion, the teacher reiterates the key learning points to close the session. In essence, hikma is a teaching format based on skilled scholarly narrative and open discourse. Hikma is designed to nurture reflection, deep thinking, and respect for wisdom.

INTRODUCTION

A renewed interest in instructional methods has highlighted the importance of exemplary teaching and dialogue in the learning process (Olfah, 2023). This has led to an emphasis in education leadership to achieve learning goals optimally (Niah, 2022). Unfortunately, there has been a recent decline in learning leading to academic demoralization among students (Muassomah et al., 2022). It is well known that the choice of pedagogical approach is critically important in higher education (Muniandy & Abdullah, 2023). Developing learners' intellectual and moral character "requires

innovative teaching and learning techniques which are enjoyable and able to motivate students” (Asyafah, 2014). As Syamsul Maarif (2017) has observed, “teachers have responsibilities to transfer values of kindness with full of affection to students and they should have knowledge and art of teaching.”

Based on these emerging needs, a new instructional strategy was developed to address the current challenges and problems in education.

METHOD

A integrative approach was used to develop a new teaching format. Research literature was searched using the Scopus database to formulate key features of a teaching method that encapsulates traditional and modern approaches to pedagogy. Research studies that identified characteristics of effective teachers and their praxis were included. Empirical findings from educational research surveys were used to select strategies to enhance learning and avoid ineffective instructional design.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Hikma is a new teaching method based on a narrative approach to scholarly discourse. It is aimed as an alternative to lectures in higher education. It is based on ancient traditions of respect for the teacher, authority of the learned elders, and etiquettes of a good learner. At its heart is the well-being and enlightenment of learners. The word *hikma* is an Arabic term which means wisdom and discernment. Hikma is designed to facilitate deep learning. This level of thought can only occur in presence of a master-teacher having depth of knowledge as well as scholarly insight. The teacher fosters a warm and open atmosphere and harbors profound concern for the students. Learners develop a bond of shared understanding and genuine respect for the teacher.

A hikma session is a verbal discourse by a well-prepared teacher to a small group of students (Table 1). The session consists of a carefully prepared lecture followed by a moderated discussion, closing with a summary by the teacher. Learners show respect by following a code of etiquette. After the moderated discussion, the teacher summarizes the key learning points to close the hikma session. Hikma is designed to foster respect, deep learning, and acquisition of wisdom.

Table 1. Hikma session format

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Recommendation</i>
Venue	A room with a pleasant ambiance
Duration	1 to 2 hours
Structure	First part: Lecture presentation by teacher Second part: Moderated discussion Closure: Summary of key messages

Seating	A circular arrangement to facilitate discussion
Refreshments	Light refreshments such as flavored water and green tea
Equipment	Whiteboard and erasable markers A book to read (short passage, bookmarked) Physical objects for demonstration Sound system with a wireless clip-on microphone

The caring teacher

A great teacher has a pleasant personality, excellent interpersonal skills, and strong teaching skills (Suyatno et al., 2022). The foundation of effective hikma is the caring teacher. A caring teacher embodies politeness, care, respect for learner's self-esteem, dedication and interest in learners' well-being (Mostafaei Alaei & Forough Ameri, 2021). Such a teacher takes interest in the overall development and lifetime aspirations of each student. A caring pedagogy can form a teacher's praxis (Gholami, 2011). Compassion and humility on part of the teacher can foster creativity and confidence among students (Kurniawati et al., 2022). The hikma session manifests all these qualities of the caring teacher. Students are not humiliated or shamed. Each student is referred to by their first name. The teacher is fully present in the moment. Patience, hope, and heartfelt regard for the welfare of the learners are the hallmarks of the hikma teacher.

Preparation

Learning planning is essential for teachers to be effective during instruction sessions (Samdani, 2021). Hikma requires careful planning and preparation on part of the teacher (Appendix 1). Unprepared impromptu talks are not hikma. Planning, reflecting and preparing ahead can improve teaching skills (Erbilgin, 2019). This includes reviewing audio recordings of lectures, reflective journals, and collaborative planning with fellow teachers. It is essential that the teacher is thoroughly prepared before the hikma session. This includes developing an outline of the presentation and the content for each part. The preparation may take several days and at least six hours of preparation time are recommended for each hikma session. Extensive reading is essential. Compiled notes and scholarly excerpts help to organize thoughts. Hikma is based on a lifetime of critical study and scholarly writing on a topic.

The importance of etiquette and respect

A teacher's motivation to teach is affected by the respect and appreciation shown by students (Canlı & Karadağ, 2021). In particular, students' desire to learn plays an influential role (Börü, 2018). The concepts of *terbeya* (instilling values) and *adab* (etiquette and respect) stem from a desire to develop these qualities in learners. Learning is a two-way process: it relies as much on teaching as on a desire to learn. Students have to demonstrate an outward receptivity in order to for the teacher to

proceed with sharing knowledge and skills. For this reason, a Student Guide (Appendix 2) is essential to specify the core values and behaviors that learners show towards the teacher. This includes attentive listening as well as respect for the teacher.

The setting

The setting for hikma has to be chosen deliberately. A standard lecture hall or a classroom may not be ideal. A room with a view of a garden harboring a water feature such as a fountain or a lakeside may be sought. Extraneous objects such broken fixtures, old wall notices, and clutter are to be removed. Chairs can be neatly aligned. Sitting on a carpeted floor with footwear removed is a traditional alternative to being seated on chairs. Indirect subdued lighting, mist-generating diffusers and indoor plants can add ambiance. Green tea may be served. Certain times of the day are more conducive to deep thought. Day break (pre-dawn), sunset twilight, and late evening timings endow a transcendental milieu to the hikma session. A circular seating arrangement facilitates discussion.

Learners' etiquette

Students are informed in advance about the topic, recommended pre-reading, venue, and timing of the hikma session (Appendix 2). The students' role has to be clarified in advance in an email or on the learning management system. Students sit respectfully, leaning forward while listening intently to focus on content and provide affective responses. Students are not permitted ask questions or make comments that are unrelated to the topic. Thus, a discourse can occur centered on the theme of the hikma. They stay aware of non-verbal clues from the teacher about when to ask questions and when to remain silent during pauses. Nametags, with the first name written in large letters, are to be worn prominently. Late arriving students may join quietly without interrupting or offering excuses. The use of electronic devices has to be disallowed to avoid the distracting effects during the lecture (Alshwiah & Alaulamie, 2023). Phones can be switched to silent mode.

The teacher's lecture

The teacher's presentation is the heart of the hikma. It provides a solid foundation for the subsequent discussion. It is not recommended to start a session with a question such as "Tell me what you already know about this topic?" Such an open assessment of baseline knowledge is intimidating and can be embarrassing. It may be better to start with a story, a personal anecdote or a rhetorical question.

The teacher talks slowly and deliberately during the session while avoiding reading from notes. Teachers can show depth of knowledge by recalling dates, facts and figures from memory. It may be beneficial to read aloud a short passage from a book to indicate the importance of reading. A historical event can be described in great detail – as if the teacher were a witness. Sharing a personal anecdote or retelling the

life events of a scholar can help in adding a narrative quality to the hikma session. Personal opinion can be expressed in cases of controversies when academic consensus is lacking.

Certain teaching techniques foster reflective thinking during the hikma session. These include varying the tone of voice to emphasize a point, and pausing for reflection (with a smile to indicate that that silent pause is for reflection rather than an opportunity to ask questions). Eye contact and concerned frowning increase the intensity of thought.

The hikma session is brief and focused, so as to be not burdensome on the learners. The session needs to end a few minutes before the pre-specified end time even if the talk is not complete and students request to extend the time.

Whiteboard

A chalkboard or a whiteboard can be used occasionally (but not excessively). For instance, keywords and their relationships can be illustrated with diagrams. Drawings are to be accurate and artistic, and not cartoonish and distorted. Colors can be used with deliberate choice. For instance, red could be used to highlight a disadvantage or a potential pitfall. The teacher's handwriting on the whiteboard needs to be aesthetically pleasing. This can be attained by practice by the teacher. The baseline of handwritten text stays neatly horizontal. Scribbling detailed notes on the whiteboard with the back towards the audience is to be avoided.

Reflective questions

The goal of the reflective questions is to make learners think. Hence, the questions can be phrased to be open ended and thought provoking. Such questions often start with 'Why do you think ...' or 'What are the reasons behind ...' and do not have a simple yes or no answer. Each question can be followed by a silent pause without letting any one student to answer it. A quiet pause that allows all students to reflect has an enduring effect. The teacher may decide not to provide an answer creating an air of uncertainty. Asking reflective open-ended questions followed by silent pauses encourages active retrieval by students fostering deep learning.

Guided discovery

Hikma is carefully crafted to enable guided discovery. As an exposition that unfolds like a story, the talk progresses from what is already known to a new insight. Using a logical progression of ideas, events and observations, the teacher builds the evidence for (and against) a possible explanation. Teachers can avoid providing answers or conclusions to all the issues. It may be more effective to provide the evidence and let the students think for themselves. A hikma session does not have to be overly formal and didactic. While the teacher can clarify misconceptions and difficult

concepts, a boring monologue can be avoided. Humor can be added subtly to keep listeners engaged.

Storytelling

A core component of *hikma* is storytelling. Stories are powerful ways to connect, relate and inspire. Yet, they are underused in teaching, especially in higher education. Key features of stories can be incorporated into the hikma discourse. Contextual features such as a place and time are essential. There is a protagonist who leads the story, sometimes it is the narrator. Other characters appear in the timeline. The storyteller's perspective is fundamental in this process. Thus, the story is not an objective recount of events but rather it is intertwined with experienced feelings and the personal worldview of the speaker. Stories allow us to be more open and explore deeper emotions. The storyteller can explore a personal perspective and receive reflective insight from the students.

Moderated discussion

After the teacher's presentation, a moderated discussion on the topic reinforces learning and clarifies misconceptions. Senior faculty and special guests who are present can be requested to ask questions before students.

It is preferable that students avoid asking questions in the middle of the lecture. Mid-lecture questions can interrupt the flow of thought of the teacher and the rest of the students. Learners' questions can be deferred to the end of the session.

An unmoderated discussion can become an exchange of opinions that lacks scholarly depth. Student's questions have to be related to the topic otherwise the questions may detract from the theme of the lecture. Irrelevant off-topic comments can undermine the learning of other students.

Asking questions to test knowledge is not part of hikma. Students do not need to prepare for the hikma session as an assessment. Students are not evaluated for participation in the session. Pointing to a student when asking questions can be stressful to learners; instead, a teacher's question can be addressed to all students. Vocal students who have already spoken can be signaled non-verbally to let others have an opportunity to speak. The hikma session is not an opportunity for some students to show their knowledge. A student can ask a second question after the rest of students have had their turn. The teacher stays on the lookout for any questions or comments from quieter students.

Hikma is different from small group discussions. Small group discussion without a preceding lecture can be directionless and incoherent. Hikma, on the other hand, is well prepared, goal directed, focused, and based on scholarly research. Learners may perceive it as a friendly discourse with a mentor. Hikma is geared towards learning. More than a facilitator, the hikma teacher is a trusted guide and a source of wisdom based on accumulated knowledge, experience, and deep reflection.

Hikma is different from the Socratic Method (Table 2) even though both are forms of scholarly discourse (Birnbache, 1999; Dallimore, 1976).

Table 2. A comparison of Hikma with the Socratic Method

	<i>Hikma</i>	<i>Socratic method</i>
Format	Scholarly discourse	Interrogative dialogue
Goal	To enlighten (<i>tanweer</i>)	To show logical inconsistencies or gaps in student's knowledge
Learner	Best interests of the learner	To show the superiority of the teacher
Technique	Story telling Sharing wisdom	Probing questions Logical arguments
Mood	Respectful, dignified	Abrasive, humiliating
Preparation	Requires substantial preparation	Extempore, spontaneous

After the discussion, the teacher closes the session with a summary of key learning points.

Session evaluation by students

Understanding students' needs, opinions, and point of view is essential for effective teaching. Written anonymous feedback about the session can be elicited from the students after each session. The filled forms may be submitted or emailed to an administrative person such as a department secretary, and not to the teacher directly. This feedback is a powerful improvement tool for the teacher. The teacher revises the lecture materials and develops examination questions immediately after the session.

CONCLUSION

Hikma is a teaching strategy consisting of a scholarly narrative followed by a moderated discussion. The form and function of this teaching strategy has been carefully crafted to enable deep learning and acquisition of wisdom. The seating arrangement, the choice of venue, the guidelines for the teacher and learners are designed to enrich education. Hikma takes the teacher's craft to a higher level. It lets learners experience the exhilaration of guided discovery and shared human understanding. It carries the transcendent feeling of hope for the next generation and the passing on of entrusted wisdom.

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Appendix 1 Teacher's Guide to the Hikma Session

Title	
Course	
Students	Limit to less than 20 students, if possible.
Date	
Time	Schedule a time convenient to the students. Limit the duration to 1 to 2 hours. Shorter duration is better.
Venue	Choose a pleasant venue.
Preparation	Prepare well in advance (at least a week earlier). Write an outline with detailed notes. Try to commit the outline to memory by reading it several times. Memorize quotes, facts, dates and relevant numbers, so you don't have read them from notes.
Lecture	Start with a stimulating case study. Present findings from research studies. Say the numeric data from memory. Narrate stories and historical events with interesting details. Write key terms and draw diagrams on the whiteboard. Read a short passage from a book. Build evidence towards a logical conclusion (guided discovery). Ask open-ended reflective questions followed by silent pauses without letting students answer. Let the students know that these are 'thinking questions'. Wave your hand gently to signal distracted students to pay attention. End the lecture with a summary of key learning points.
Discussion	Keep half of the session time for questions and answers. Moderate the Discussion to facilitate participation by all students. Ask students who are vocal and dominating to let other have a chance. Encourage silent students to ask questions. Pause for several seconds. Say "Who has a question?" instead of "Any questions?"
Closure	Summarize the key learning points again after the Discussion.
End of session	End promptly 5 minutes before the pre-specified time even if all the content has not been covered. Keep a clock visible during the session. You may have to end abruptly. Never exceed the allotted time even if the students are interested and requesting you to do so.
Feedback	Request students to fill out the Session Evaluation form (printed or online).

Appendix 2 Students' Guide to the Hikma Session

Title	
Course	
Date	
Time	Start and end Aim to arrive 5 minutes before the start time.
Venue	Driving and walking directions
Teacher	Name, brief biography, informal portrait photograph
Reading	Please read pages ...
Preparation	Wear nametags with first-name printed in large letters. Wear respectful clothing (full sleeves, full length). Avoid clothes with advertising or slogans or images.
At the start	Wait quietly for the teacher. Stand up briefly when the teacher arrives. Remain silent while the teacher is preparing. Offer to assist the teacher if needed.
Listening to the lecture	Listen attentively (show facial expressions, head nodding). Sit respectfully (even you are not interested in the topic). Avoid talking to other students. Leave quietly to go the restroom if needed, do not interrupt.
Note taking	Bring a notepad and a pen to write notes. Do not take notes on an electronic device.
Electronic devices	Please be respectful: Do not use electronic devices Hide your phone and computer: do not leave it visible. Set your phone to Silent (vibration) mode. If your phone rings, press any button immediately to silence the ringing. Do not answer your phone or send a message.
Questions	Keep your question to the end of the session. Do not ask questions in the middle of the presentation. Do not interrupt the teacher or another student. Ask a well prepared question that is related to the topic. Avoid asking more than one question – give everyone a chance. Avoid asking questions unrelated to the topic. Do not make judgmental comments or express a personal opinion without evidence. Avoid asking about attendance, exams, and other issues: ask later on afterwards. Avoid making a comment without asking a question. Do not condemn an individual – critique the ideas in a balanced manner. Do not humiliate or make fun of a fellow student.
End of session	Stand up when the teacher leaves. Remain silent and leave quietly after the teacher has left.